

## Full-Time Study for F-1 & J-1 Students during COVID-19

International students are required to pursue full-time enrollment every academic term to maintain their US immigration status as an F-1 Student or J-1 Exchange Visitor while in the US. Additionally, F/J regulations limit using online study to meet the full-time threshold. During the COVID-19 pandemic, however, the US Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) has temporarily suspended these enrollment requirements to accommodate modified academic operations. The following immigration framework is in place for Fall 2020 and Spring 2021, or longer. Please visit ISO's [COVID-19 FAQs](#) or contact us [questions@iso.rochester.edu](mailto:questions@iso.rochester.edu).

### Key Immigration Terms & Glossary

- **SEVIS:** Student and Exchange Visitor System, the ICE database used to administer the F/J/M academic visa programs
- **Active (continuing):** SEVIS status for a student who is currently pursuing a US program of study and maintaining their student immigration category, which may include periods of work authorization following degree completion
- **Initial (new):** SEVIS status for a student who will begin/resume a US program of study and is not currently maintaining a valid student immigration category while outside the country or in another US immigration category
- **Full-Time Study:** Threshold of 12 academic credits, or an institutional equivalent for graduate programs, needed each academic term (excluding vacation periods) for international students to maintain academic study/progress
- **Distance Education:** Course delivered via electronic means and does not require physical attendance for classes, examination or other purpose(s) integral to the completion of the class (UR = Complete Online; Correspondence)

### SEVIS Processing for F-1 & J-1 students

To understand the impact of temporary adaptations during COVID-19, please consider standard SEVIS processing:



Unless authorized for an exception, F-1 and J-1 students cannot maintain status **in the US** without full-time enrollment, and normally (in non-COVID times) no more than 1 distance education course may be used to satisfy that requirement. This restriction is relaxed due to COVID-19. Due to the pandemic,

- DHS allows active students who are already present in the US or outside the US to enroll in full-time courses remotely (online).
- DHS requires that initial (new) students who have entered the US engage in a hybrid program of in-person and online course. Initial (new) students who have not entered the US may engage fully online from their home country or residence abroad without the benefit of a SEVIS immigration status.

### Full-Time Study & Distance Education during COVID-19

According to current ICE guidance, students with a continuing/Active SEVIS record [#4 above] are afforded considerable flexibility to enroll online regardless of their location. Most students with a new/Initial SEVIS record [#2 above] must pursue some in-person study during their first semester **in the US**, which may coincide with their matriculation at UR or with a postponed arrival after beginning their degree remotely from abroad. *Note:* Students (initial and active) enrolling from outside the US are not required to maintain a valid SEVIS record and, from the perspective of ICE, may engage in full or part-time classes online. Please also note that some countries may regulate online education independent of U.S. immigration regulations. If departments have questions about these issues, please contact the Office of Global Engagement ([global@rochester.edu](mailto:global@rochester.edu)). Departments should also be aware that US Export Controls and OFAC restrictions apply to distance learning in specific countries. For more information, please review guidance from UR's Office of Research and Project Administration: <https://www.rochester.edu/orpa/compliance/export/distance/>.

## Summary of Immigration Considerations, based on status of SEVIS record

### Active Status

- Full-time enrollment may be fully online/remote; In-person study optional
- Student may attend & maintain SEVIS status from Rochester, elsewhere in the US, or abroad
- Study from abroad is considered maintenance of F-1 or J-1 status during COVID-19
- New students who transfer from another institution in the US or continue at UR at a different level and can complete ISO Immigration check-in from within the US, are considered to be in 'Active Status' and may enroll full-time online

### Initial Status

- Full-time enrollment must include some component(s) of physical attendance, less than 100% online *in their first term of study if they are in the US and must attend from Rochester*
- Initial students unable to obtain visas or enter the US due to travel issues, can engage in full-time online courses